



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 4, 2009
Released on Wednesday, December 31, 2008**

“Commitment of the Midwives”

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 16:1–7.
Background Scripture: Exodus 1:8–21.
Lesson Text: Exodus 1:8–21.

Place: Egypt
Time: 1525 B.C.

HOW TO SAY IT

HYKOS. *Hik-sos.*

PITHOM. *Py-thum.*

PUAH. *Peu-uh.*

RAAMSES. *Ray-am-seez.*

SEMITIC. *Suh-mih-tik.*

SHIPHRAH. *Shif-ruh.*

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT:

Exodus 1:8–21

8 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.

9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we:

10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.

11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses.

12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

13 And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor:

14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor.

15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah;

16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools, if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.

18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?

19 And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.

20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty.

21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to explain how Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites began, male children were threatened with murder, and midwives defied the royal edict.

Principle: to realize that courage can triumph over adversity.

Application: to encourage believers to infuse their courage with abiding faith in God and take action that follows His will.

LESSON BACKGROUND

An underlying theme of the book of Exodus is that God keeps the promises that He had made to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in the book of Genesis. One such promise or prophecy by God was that the descendants of Abraham (or Abram) would endure some 400 years of servitude in a foreign land, where they would suffer oppression (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6).

The final chapters of the book of Genesis depict the migration of the family of Jacob from Canaan to Egypt. The date of 1876 BC is often given as the time for this migration that would turn into a stay of 430 years (Exodus 12:40, 41). The Scripture for this lesson tells why the treatment of Jacob's descendants changed from appreciation to persecution during the stay, and it reveals the means by which servitude and oppression became reality.

QUESTIONS

KING AND HIS FEAR —Exodus 1:8—14

1. What significant truth do we learn about the new king in Egypt (Exodus 1:8)?

The new king ascended Egypt's throne, and we are told he did not know Joseph. There has been much study and discussion as to the identity of this king. Many believe it was Ahmose I, who was the founder of the eighteenth dynasty. Joseph arrived in Egypt long before the reigns of the Hyksos rulers, who were usurpers from Asia during the fifteenth through seventeenth dynasties. Things would have been much different now, and Joseph was no longer an important figure.

"The new king did not remember Joseph—his privileged position in the older pharaoh's administration, his administrative skill that saved the Egyptians from starvation, and his enrichment of the pharaoh's treasury. This new pharaoh probably did not reign immediately after the death of the pharaoh of Joseph's day" (Radmacher, gen. ed., *The Nelson Study Bible*, Nelson). It is a sad commentary that Joseph was so completely forgotten, but is that not the way it often is with the passing of generations?

2. What did the pharaoh do when he saw the Hebrews were growing in number at an alarming rate (vs. 9,10)?

Pharaoh decided the situation called for shrewd dealings with the Israelites. He determined to do whatever would keep them from multiplying so rapidly and hold them in subservient positions that would keep them from organizing, he would feel

much safer. He needed to take action that would allay his fears about this growing people.

The pharaoh decided to resort to forced labor. "There were levels of slavery in Egypt. Some slaves worked long hours in mud pits while others were skilled carpenters, jewelers, and craftsmen. Regardless of their skill or level, all slaves were watched closely by ruthless slave masters, supervisors whose assignment was to keep the slaves working as fast as possible. They were specialists at making a slave's life miserable" (Osborne, gen. ed., *Life Application Bible Notes*, Tyndale).

This new king also feared the Hebrews because of their superior numbers and potential military strength. He saw that they continued to grow numerically and had the potential to turn against the Egyptians in battle. This could lead to their departure from Egypt. These situations would be disastrous. If they helped Egypt's enemies in war, Egypt might lose. If they left the land, Egypt's cheap labor would be gone.

3. How did the increased pressure of slavery affect the Hebrews (vs. 11,12)?

Charles R. Erdman described the Hebrews' situation this way: "They were compelled to labor, not only in cultivating the fields, but in digging canals, building dikes, and constructing store cities and arsenals. During interminable hours, under the scorching sun, their bare bodies bleeding from the cruel lash, they were made 'to serve with rigour,' and their lives were 'bitter with hard bondage'" (*The Book of Exodus*, Baker). The taskmasters were heads of labor gangs, indicating severe situations for laborers.

Perhaps the most important fact in this passage is the continued multiplication of the Israelites. No matter how hard the Egyptians tried to stifle them, God blessed them by increasing their numbers. The harder the Egyptians were on them, the more the Israelites increased, and their continued growth caused increased fear on the part of the Egyptians. The word translated "grieved" in Exodus 1:12 means "to be anxious" and indicates a growing dread of these prolific people.

4. Why did the Egyptians' attempt to suppress the children of Israel fail (vs. 13,14)?

"The Egyptians' attempt to suppress the propagation of the Hebrews (1:11-14) failed because it is simply not possible for human beings to ultimately thwart the will of God" (New Commentary on the Whole Bible, Tyndale). The Egyptians did not realize this, of course, and doubled their efforts to suppress the Israelites. The Hebrew word for "rigour" is *perek*, which means "to break apart," or "fracture." The word points to great severity of servitude. The Egyptians were cruel.

The Israelites' bondage was said to include hard labor making bricks and mortar, as well as working long hours in the fields. This would include all types of construction work, along with farmwork. The construction work included making the bricks for the actual building projects. The farm work entailed hard labor throughout the heat of the day, probably from sunrise to sunset. Ancient drawings have been uncovered by archaeologists showing the taskmasters standing over the workers with whips in hand.

MIDWIVES AND THEIR FEAR —Exodus 1:15—21

5. What drastic measure did the pharaoh take when he saw that forced labor was not working (vs. 15,16)?

Yet another stage of oppression is announced by the *king of Egypt*. Two *Hebrew midwives* are named as the ones who are to be the instruments of the next step that is intended to suppress further growth among the Israelites. Their names are Semitic, and this suggests that they also are Israelites (although the language allows the phrase *Hebrew midwives* to mean “midwives over the Hebrews”).

We should not conclude that these were the only Hebrew midwives, because the population was by then very large. Perhaps these were the chief midwives responsible for other midwives who served under them.

Shiphrah and Puah—the two midwives—were given the following command by Pharaoh: “When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live” (Exodus 1:16).

The king’s request is not quite what we call “partial-birth abortion,” although there are similarities. The pharaoh is asking the women to use their resources to *kill* male infants. The reason is obvious: males can become part of a fighting force against the Egyptians.

6. What was a time when you were asked to do what was wrong in order to meet the desires of someone in authority? How did you respond?

Romans 13 tells us that we are to obey those in authority. However, Peter and John refused to obey an authoritative command to speak no more in the name of Jesus. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20).

Together, these two passages tell us that our obligation to obey earthly authority ceases when that authority commands something contrary to God’s will. When Peter and John responded as they did, God provided His blessing and the church continued to grow. When we are asked to violate the will of God for the will of people, we must respond not in arrogance or vindictiveness, but rather in simple statements declaring our allegiance to the Word of God.

7. Whom did the midwives fear, and how was that fear different (v. 17)?

The first thing we are told about these midwives after they received their instructions is that they feared God. As a result, they could not do what the pharaoh commanded of them, for it would violate what they knew to be God’s ways. Their commitment was to life, not death. It had to have been their faith in God that enabled them to defy Pharaoh’s command. The text specifically says that they saved the male children alive just as they did the females. In their actions they were putting their trust in God for their lives.

8. What parallel does the example of the Hebrew midwives have for us today?

It is said that we live in a culture where human life is not regarded as highly as it was by the two midwives. The problem with abortion in our world has escalated to shameful proportions. We must remember that it is God who gives life, and only God should take life. Abortion is as much murder as what Pharaoh was advocating for the Hebrew children. We should never be guilty of having taken life in this way.

For any who might have, it is important to confess it to God and receive His forgiveness.

9. What did the pharaoh ask the women when he heard of their actions (vs. 18,19)?

When Pharaoh heard what the midwives were doing, he called them in and asked them pointedly why they were saving the baby boys alive (v. 18). It was clear that they had purposely disobeyed him, and surely his fear of the continued growth of the Hebrews drove him to follow up on the matter.

So “the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them” (v. 19).

It is possible that childbirth may be less difficult for women who endure rigorous lives. If this is the case, then the midwives state the truth. Another possibility is that the women speak only part of the truth in that the midwives have determined to be very slow about responding when making their house calls. Under this possibility, the Hebrews are fully aware of the reason for the delay, and it is agreed that each baby will be born and breathing before a midwife arrives.

10. Why did God bless them in spite of their apparent lie (vs. 20, 21)?

The question often arises as to whether the midwives lied and why God could bless them if they did. Charles Ryrie had some thoughts on this and explained it this way: “This may be a true statement; but even if it was a lie, the midwives are not commended for lying, but for refusing to kill. The pharaoh had resorted to male infanticide. Perhaps the midwives were deliberately slow in arriving to help the mothers” (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody).

The oppression of the people, however, does not end (see the last verse of the chapter and the account of Moses’ birth in Exodus 2). But the efforts to practice population control at this time are futile.

The *midwives* eventually are blessed with their own children—that’s the implication of *he made them houses*. We may say that “they lived happily ever after.” Times often will be difficult for the Israelites as the years pass, but for now they have examples of faith and faithfulness of two midwives who fear *God* and are blessed for their decision.

CONCLUSION CONSEQUENCES

The midwives’ response to the king’s question has more than one possible interpretation as noted. But the bottom line is that their fear of the Lord was greater than their fear of the consequences that the king of Egypt could administer.

The results could have been disastrous. We recall that God does not always choose to provide physical protection and blessing for those who take a stand for Him; the martyrdoms of the prophets and the apostles speak to this fact clearly. We thus should not come away from this lesson believing that taking a stand for God will result in an easier or safer earthly life.

But God did choose to bless the two midwives who feared Him. In the final analysis, to hear the words “Well done” is the desired eternal consequence for those who serve Him, no matter the earthly consequence (Matthew 25:21,23).

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Those who seek worldly power often see believers as a threat to them (Exodus 1:8-10).
- 2.** Persecution is sometimes a means God uses to bring about growth (vs. 11,12).
- 3.** Neither spiritual heritage nor commitment assures us of an easy life (vs. 13,14).
- 4.** We are to be good citizens, but God's word always takes precedence over man's (vs. 15-17).
- 5.** Those who obey God must be prepared to account for their actions (vs. 18,19).
- 6.** Actions motivated by proper fear of God will be rewarded by God (vs. 20,21).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Pleasing God is the most important thing.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for this study that has prompted a greater commitment to make godly decisions. We all go through crises in life, and these often offer us choices. The important thing is that we bring glory to You when a crisis comes. This will require courage, but with the power of Your Spirit, we shall prevail. In Jesus' name, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Israelite spies sent in to Canaan were sheltered by Rahab the harlot in Jericho and aided in escaping. When the walls later came tumbling down, she and her family were saved. She was the mother of Boaz—husband of Ruth, and great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:18—22; Matt. 1:5).

January 11th's lesson is titled, "Rahab's Commitment." The printed lesson is Joshua 2:1—4, 8—14; 6:22—23, 25. Study Joshua 2:1—24; 6:22—25 in preparation for this lesson. Good studying!

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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Have a blessed New Year! From all of us, at Jesus Is All Ministries.

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